This paper is based upon an MPhil thesis.

**ABSTRACT**
The present study is an endeavor to give voice to the beleaguered ones of society, a society where social eminence, money and political supremacy are the whole thing. The paper exposes the fabrication of society which is divided into two groups, upper class (Bourgeoisie) and lower class (Proletariat). Social and economic disparities lead towards the felonious and criminal atmosphere which gives birth to coercion, suppression and despair among the lower class. The research exposes the economic dissipation of society where reality is a social construct and a device in the hands of the elite class, the bourgeoisies. The economic system of modern day society is a knotty snare, set by the upper class intentionally to ensnare the proletariats. Carl Marx talks about the social and economic discrimination, and opines that revolutionary cognizance is the only way to culminate the tyranny of the upper class. The paper concludes that an even economic system and egalitarian society are the emblem of a healthy society.

**Key Words:** Marxism, Victor Hugo, Bourgeoisie, Proletariat
INTRODUCTION

The research article analyzes Hugo’s masterpiece *Les Miserables* through Marxist Consciousness. It emphasizes on the chief characters and important happenings of the narrative. Marxist philosophy is applied to the text to give expression to the oppressed strata of society. The study exposes that the man-made socioeconomic classification refutes the humanistic values and leads towards the offending happenings. Valjean, the hero of the novel, remains captured for 19 years merely due to the crime of stealing a piece of loaf for the starving kids of his widow sister.

It is very firmly believed for a long time that reality is as simple as we can see the things or the way they seem to us (Bressler, 1994). But Marxism disproves this established ideology entirely. It believes that reality is merely a social construct, an apparatus in the hands of elites who become responsible for all the socio-economic problems. All the means of production are in the hands of the upper class and they intentionally make a structure which helps the upper class and destroys the lower class. Marxism, a socioeconomic model, is defined by Encarta Reference Library as:

An economic and social system based upon the political and economic theories of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels… A theory in which class struggle is a central element in the analysis of social change in Western societies.” Marxism is the contrast of capitalism that is defined by Encarta as “an economic system based on the private ownership of the means of production and distribution of goods, characterized by a free competitive market and motivation by profit (www.encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com).

Class bifurcation and class encounter are centuries old phenomena. *Oppressed* and *oppressor* have always been standing in the opposition of each other since the beginning of the history of human civilization. Marx argues that “history is a series of class struggles and uprisings. Under feudalism and capitalism members of the lower and working class, which he calls the *proletariat*, are oppressed and alienated by the wealthy elite, whom he calls the bourgeoisie.”
In “Manifesto of the Communist Party”, the characteristics of bourgeoisie are defined by Marx and Engels (1969) as:

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his “natural superiors”, and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous “cash payment”. It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentality, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom – Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation (Marx and Engels, 1969: 15-16).

Hugo’s Les Miserables unmistakably demonstrates the image of the elite class as classified by Marx and Engels. Hugo displays the characters that are struggling for their survival and combating against manipulation and exploitation. The novel is based on the narratives of the miserable ones, the wretched ones and the beleaguered ones like Valjean, Fantine and Cosette. The research intends to encourage the oppressed ones to raise slogans for their rights, for their social as well as material identity in a superficial society.

Previous Study

Many articles and dissertations have been composed to explore the threads of Marxist consciousness in fiction. In the well-known universities of United Kingdom following researches have been done on Marxist ideology and Victor Hugo’s Les Miserables.

This study is about British working-class fiction in the post-war period. Some of the main issues dealt with in the course of this study are language, form, community, self/identity/autobiography, sexuality and relationship with bourgeois art. The major argument centres on two questions: representation of working-class life, and the relationship between working-class literary tradition and dominant ideologies (Malek Mohammad, 1990).

- Raphael’s thesis ‘Authoring the revolution, 1819-1848/49: radical German and English literature and the shift from political to social revolution’ is completed in 2007. The researcher states:

This thesis addresses, from a comparative perspective, an important lacuna in the research devoted to German and English revolutionary literature in the period from 1819 up to the European revolutions of 1848/49. It illustrates that a major shift from a concept of political revolution to one of social revolution took place within these years which is reflected in radical literature between the ‘Peterloo Massacre’ (1819) and the failure of the bourgeois political revolution of 1848/49 (Raphael, 2007).


- Bowley’s dissertation is completed in 1944. It is a classic research on Victor Hugo. The thesis ‘Victor Hugo in the light of English criticism and opinion during the nineteenth century’ explores Hugo’s place in 19th century.

Methodology

The research is a textual analysis rooted in the hermeneutic tradition of interpretation. The philosophy of Hermeneutic stresses on the reader’s particular standpoint or response. In the present research, the researchers strongly believe that reality is a social construct and it is a device of maneuvering in the hands of the upper class. The relevant textual chunks have been marked after the close reading of the novel, Les Miserables to examine the trauma of the oppressed class. The events where the clash between the ‘Haves’ and ‘Have not’s’ are shown in the novel have been examined in Marxist perspective. The special focus is on the characters of Valjean and Fantine who are the inferior and miserable ones in every respect, and becomes the victims at the hands of elites. The Communist Manifesto is the core reference book for present analysis to expose the economic debauchery of the society. The chief objective of the researchers is to expose the ideological domination of the elite class and the way they fabricate the cobweb of false consciousness to oppress and suppress the poor class. Marx disavows the authority and supremacy of the upper class but he also strongly denounces the conduct of lower class when they bear oppression. He as well as Hugo believes that revolutionary consciousness is obligatory to resolve the social issues.

Analysis

The echoes of subjugation and oppression are much visible in the novel Les Miserables, and can be seen through the characters’ shrieks and conversations. Every character generates a loud cry against the unspeakable and horrifying oppression which is the result of the irregular and uneven economic system and the damaging cliché of high and low, rich and poor.

Terry Eagleton (2002) defines Marxism as:
A scientific theory of human societies and of the practice of transforming them; and what that means, rather more concretely, is that the narrative Marxism has to deliver is the story of the struggles of men and women to free themselves from certain forms of exploitation and oppression (xii).

This is the exact what Hugo has shown in the novel. He presents a detailed account of the societies and human behaviours to show that how man is greedily lusty for the ecstatic desires of the power. Man’s obsession to rule leads him to the bestial level where humanity, morality, civilization and wisdom lost their meaning and charm. Marx trusts that reality can be defined and described as that the consciousness of human beings can be shaped by the influences of the socioeconomic beliefs as well as directly by the society.

*Les Miserables* is a character-based novel where characters are battling against the exploitation and brutal oppression rampant in the society. Jean Valjean is the protagonist of the novel who remains behind bars for 19 years because he stole one loaf of bread for the hungry kids of his widowed sister. His desolation and wretchedness makes him poorer when he tries to escape again and again and receives 14 years of extra imprisonment. During his captivity he lost his identity and was called with the names 24601 and 9430. He gets alienated from himself because he is forced to transform into so many characters as he is an ex-convict and has no normal life because laws are only for the poor.

Hugo pens that “through the working of laws and customs there continues to exist a condition of social condemnation which artificially creates a human hell within civilization” (Hugo, 2008: 99). Valjean is the leading example of it. The human society turns him into a felon. What other option was available to him when the toddlers of his sister were crying out of hunger? It is the inhuman society and its complex economic net that entraps him into an act of stealing. Hugo has the view that “Have no fear of robbers or murderers. They are external dangers, petty
dangers. We should fear ourselves. Prejudices are the real robbers; vices the real murderers” (Hugo, 2008: 25).

Hugo and Marx both believe that it is the supremacy of upper class which does not consent the lower class to grow and flourish. They purposely keep them at remoteness and lower level because their supremacy lies in their subjugation. Fantine, the other miserable one is anotherrepresentative of the oppressed folk. She is a naïve, attractive, shy girl who eventually (because of economic oppression) turns into a putrid, sick, horrid prostitute. Hugo defines Fantine in the novel as "Fantine was one of those beings which are brought forth from the heart of the people... She was called Fantine because she had never been known by any other name..."(Hugo, 2008: 77). She becomes the victim of the society, a society where the upper class exploits the innocence of the lower class and escapes away quite easily. They know that they have the power to subdue the law in front of them. Hugo describes Fantine’s transformation from rose to thorn:

All four were ravishingly beautiful. As to Fantine, she was joy itself. Her splendid teeth had evidently been endowed by God with one function - that of laughing. Her thick blond tresses, inclined to wave, and easily escaping from their confinement, obligated her to fasten them continually. Her rosy lips babbled with enchantment. The corners of her mouth, turned up voluptuously, seemed to encourage audacity; but her long, shadowy eyelashes were cast discreetly down towards the lower part of her face as if to check its festive tendencies. Her whole toilette was indescribably harmonious and enchanting. Fantine was beautiful, without being too conscious of it. She possessed two types of beauty - style and rhythm. Style is the force of the ideal, rhythm is its movement (Hugo, 2008: 110).

Her parents’ origins are unknown but it is clear that is from a lower class because when the elite boy abandons her with the illegitimate child, she has nobody to fall back upon. Hugo describes her: “she is having gold and pearls for her dowry; but the gold was on her head and the pearls in her mouth” (Hugo, 2008: 777).
Conclusion

It can be concluded that the double standards of society are man-made. The rich Bourgeoisie class purposefully weaves this economic web and ensnare the lower class. The research tries to establish the fact that economic parity and social impartiality are the best means to resolve the contradictory issues and to abolish the absurdity of life. The paper demonstrates that it is the behavior of society at large that encourages the criminality among the normal behavior oriented people. Fantine and Valjean are the good examples as one turns into prostitute and the other goes behind the bars. The research rejects the class distinction that become the reason of Persecution in *Les Miserables* and in our society as well.
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